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A Story For Every Category III : Science Fiction



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Chapter 1 by intellikat

AN EMPTY ROAD in the middle of rural Iowa. Moonlight bathing an expanse of cornfields as far as the eye can see. Wind moving through the husks and leaves. A pair of high beams suddenly pierce the dull night and a small car throttles by, stirring the fields for a moment. At the wheel of the car, an attractive YOUNG WOMAN. An open map lies beside her on the passenger's seat.

As the woman leans over to examine the map, her speed gradually decreases. A beaten pickup truck passes on the left very slowly, its middle-aged white male driver staring in at the woman behind a bushy beard and tinted glasses. Unnerved, she grips the wheel tightly and stares straight ahead. As the truck pulls back into the right lane ahead of her she sees that its license plate reads GALACTIC. A new pair of headlights appear in the woman's rear-view mirror and grow ever larger.

What is this guy doing? she thinks.

The driver flips on his high beams.

Just go around. Go around.

Suddenly blue lights ricochet abo

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The woman pulls over to the gravel shoulder and puts the car in park. A man steps from the car behind her and strides slowly up to her vehicle, resting an arm on the roof and looking in.

Evening, ma'am.

Hi.

For a moment THE POLICEMAN seems to pause as he gets a good look at her face.

May I see your license and vehicle registration, please?

Of course.

As she retrieves them, the policeman studies her face intently without her noticing his gaze. She hands him the two items.

Michigan, huh? Where are you heading tonight, Ms. Peterson?

Well. I'm on my way to Colorado.

He hums a familiar tune to a beer commercial.

Long way to drive, ma'am. I'll be back in a minute.

The policeman returns to his car while the woman waits. On a laptop secured to the dashboard he types in some information from her license. A picture comes up on the screen followed by a scrolling list of information. His eyes move along the list. He returns to her car.

The reason I stopped you Ms. Peterson, is that your rear lights are out which is pretty dangerous especially on these back roads.

Oh.

I can't let you drive like this at night.

Oh? Is there somewhere I can go?

highway somewhere back

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be stuck out here. I got off the

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--I understand ma'am. It may just be a fuse or a bulb in which case there's a station just a ways down where you could replace it. I can give you a rear escort that far.

Oh thank you so much.

He returns to his car and after a moment switches on his blue lights. The woman draws carefully out onto the road again as her escort follows.

Down the road, as the policeman has said, a well-lit gas station appears out of the farmland and the woman pulls in. She sees two other police cars in the lot filling up at the pumps. A group of three policemen stand around them, chatting.

You just hang on a second, ma'am. I'll be right back.

Her policeman walks toward the garage, where a light still shines from within. The cops at the pump greet him warmly as he passes.

The woman looks at the glowing clock on her radio display reading 11:30.

The policeman enters the garage. She can see him talking with a MECHANIC. A few moments later the mechanic exits and heads toward her car. He looks like a greasy James Dean with a beer can hanging loosely from one hand.

Rear lights out?

He tips back the beer in a long gulp. As he does so, she notices a tattoo on his forearm. It's a television set with the letter G within the screen.

Let's check yer fuse box first.

There is a pause.

Fuse box is under yer dash, there.

Oh, of course.

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She opens her door and ti

steering column.

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work beneath the

Headin' out to Colorado huh? Beautiful country out there.

I haven't been there for five or six years now.

All that clear mountain spring water. Lotsa good beer.

I suppose so.

He motions to the rear of the car.

See how she looks now.

The woman walks around the back as the mechanic climbs out.

Oh, that's it. Thank you, thank you. What do I owe you?

No charge.

Well thank you.

You have a safe trip now.

I will. Thank you again.

The woman starts up her car and wheels around the pumps toward the exit. Her policeman has joined the other cops there. He approaches as she draws near.

All fixed up?

Yes, it was just a fuse like you said.

Good deal.

Can you tell me where I-80 is? I got off the highway because of the construction but I'm afraid

I'm a bit lost now.

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You just head the direction you were going here on state 64 about five more miles down and you'll hit county H. There's a sign for it. Just take a right on county H, follow that a bit further down, and you'll reach I-80. Can't miss it.

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Right on county H. Great. Thank you so much.

You have a safe trip now.

I will.

The woman pulls out and drives away as the policemen watch. When her car has disappeared into the night, the one who has helped her depresses a button on his shoulder microphone revealing a tattoo similar to the mechanic's on his forearm.

Put Bains on.

The woman rolls down the dark and empty road scanning for an interstate sign. After some time she sees it. Slowing down, she turns right onto county road H. The road is unpaved and dusty. Rocks crunch beneath her tires. The view on either side becomes two running wooden fences which enclose familiar, towering corn stalks.

As she drives along, the width of the road narrows considerably and from time to time she has to wrench the steering wheel quickly to avoid the numerous potholes. But then suddenly and without warning her engine splutters and simply dies and then the small car rolls to a stop. Its headlights flicker off for a second and then back on.

Oh no. Oh God no.

She tries the ignition, the starter spluttering but not turning over. She looks out the open window around her car. All is black now except the empty road ahead illuminated by her headlights. She rolls up her window and locks the door. She tries the engine again, pleading with it. She digs through her purse to find her cell phone. Dialing, she cranes her head to the rear. When she turns to face the front again an old man is bent down looking in her window.

She screams, dropping the cell phone to the floorboard and beating hysterically on the horn.

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After about fifty yards she breaks through into a clearing. The moonlight reveals her startled face as she gasps breathlessly at what has suddenly appeared before her: there in the midst of a fresh crop circle stands a shimmering, silver spacecraft.

From a well-lit gangway the outline of a figure descends, and with that the woman faints.

Chapter 2 by Noel



She awakens hours later in the alien ship. There are bright lights shining in her eyes, blinding her. She tries to struggle, but finds that she can't move. As soon as her eyes adjust to the bright lights, she looks around the single, circular room in the spacecraft.

It is a relatively small room, perhaps 40 feet across. There are twelve little green men spread around the room. Some at control panels around the edge of the room. Two examining her. Two sitting on some kind of enclosed chairs. And one, one figure standing alone, staring out of the large cylindrical window that encompassed the entire room.

The figure turned and walked slowly towards her. Once it reached her, it began to speak in a strange and babbling tongue. Immediately, a computerized voice, obviously a translator and with no apparent source, sounded in her ears.

Chapter 3 by intellikat



Ms Peterson. Janet.

Yes?

This is your name?

Yes?

Do not be afraid Janet.

She doesn't respond to this strange command, and just she also does not feel as unnerved as she had before. She wonders if she had heard news of the machines surrounding her.

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Where are we?

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We are within the craft you discovered in the cornfield.

Are we still... in Iowa?

We are no longer in your solar system. We are enroute to your new home.

My...? New home?

You will be very much at home on Pentax. There are many other humans there. Many other performers. Like you.

Janet feels her heart rate quicken.

Performers...? What do you mean by that?

The figure motions to ANOTHER GREEN BEING who has been examining her, and this being lifts a very thin tube in its long, spindly fingers. The tube is attached to a plastic bag hanging from above, and the bag looks to be filled with some kind of yellow fluid.

All will be explained in time. Please. You must rest now, Janet Peterson.

Goddammit. Let me out of here.

It is useless to resist. Please. Your transition will be much more pleasurable if you choose to relax.

The first creature turns to a control board and pushes several buttons in combination as the other tucks the tube into the corner of Janet's mouth. Instantly, the yellow fluid begins to flow and Janet is shocked to taste cold beer in her mouth. An IPA. A good one, in fact.

From above and around, music begins to play. The figure adjusts a few controls on the board, and at once the room is filled with the mellowed tones of Stan Getz.

Janet feels her eyelids grow heavy as her body relaxes, and before she knows it, she is lulled into a gentle haze.

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Up in the orb, anything is possible.

A short, blue-tinted being watches a large screen. On it, he watches the young woman asleep on the table. He sees the twelve green aliens busy at work around the craft.

A taller, lighter-blue friend smiles gently beside him.

This is incredible, SETT.

Shhh. I know.

The one named Sett pours a third of skrill-juice into a tiny glass and adds a few drops of latex-based shade for good measure. What he is watching on the screen before him truly is incredible. The resemblance the young woman has.... How uncanny it was to have found her on Earth.

Sett had been to Earth twice himself. The first time he had been assigned to deliver a message to one of the many crews on a smaller land mass named, quite stirringly, "The United Kingdom." Back then, over a decade ago, it was protocol to vaporize an adjacent crop formation with the content of the message. President Uhlok-Nelson had thought it an ingenious method, and quite a dramatic one, too. He had quickly signed the protocolic papyrus which put the method into effect when it was first offered by the Pentaxian scientists. The earthmen apparently loved it as well, and had given it a lot of air time on their own television, which had in turn sparked interest in the hearts of Pentaxian viewers, causing P-TV to begin airing the earth programs (subtitled, of course) during their own weekly schedules.

Unfortunately, some pranksters on Earth had begun to fake the process by their own means—really quite immature and unbelievable, but this had thrown some doubt into the whole business, and soon those whose position Sett now held were having to come up with new material.

On his second visit to Earth, this time to the North American continent, Sett had managed to come upon a convenience store out in the country which he had taken immediate advantage of.

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The grizzled man behind the counter had been a bit of a mystery, but the short man dragging case after case of Pabst Blue Ribbon had been a sight to see. He had readily accepted the credit card he was given in exchange.

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That was another thing.

Meddling in the Earth economy was nothing new. Pentaxians had been doing it for centuries. It had always been easy to produce facsimiles of the metallic lumps with little images on them, the little bits of colored cellulose fiber, and now these bendable polymers with crisp little digits punched in them. How fun.

The Pentaxian scientists had quickly discovered the correlation between the order of digits and information stored within the messy network of Earth computers, in what these “credit card” companies called accounts. It was easy enough to create an account within the computer network, (as primitive and full of loopholes as it was) which allowed an infinite credit line for the Pentaxian user and required only a minimum payment of ten American dollars per month, which was easily paid off with the little bits of colored cellulose fiber.

The only unwanted side effect of this was a never ending sea of invitations to join other credit card companies. This wave arrived consistently on the doorstep of the unfortunate Pentaxian operative whose five decade tour-of-duty on Earth was comprised solely of paying off the minimum balance and disposing of this mass of invitations.

Some Pentaxian analysts said this was all very, very bad, but no one listened to them.

Sett throws back his drink.

GLIP was right. This was incredible. The magazines would go nuts over this woman. She looked almost exactly like the late Grebo Volpone (Thrax bless her sou).

Do you think there’s a contract in it, Sett?

Sett sips his juice, then freezes. Complete motionlessness was one way Pentaxians indicated affirmation with one another.

My audience will get only the best, Glip.

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Both Sett and Glip know that the boardroom hovered within a tiny bubble of space-time, tailored to the needs of the P-TV execs, so the slight dramatic pause between the conclusion of the screen test and their contacting Sett was truly unnecessary. Indeed, thanks to their quad-dimensional cell phones, they could have told Sett their reaction even before the first images of the tiny car rolling by the cornfields had been transmitted, or before Sett had even been appointed chief controller position thirty years ago, when he was still making wheel-thrown pottery in zero gravity from Enthrofrogolian excrement. Being inside the time bubble meant that they could send messages to, order pizza from, make crank calls at any moment of time, past or present.

Even more dramatic, however, than informing Sett a few measly decades before (and dramatic effect was what the foundations of Pentaxian history were built upon. Consider the War of 18-Dimensions, which began from what Pentaxian historians are required to teach as “A slightly overdressed attempt at approaching the Overnaught race in welcome with an overemphasized element of bravado.”) they could have phoned him their reaction at the very moment of his birth, which of course he wouldn’t have remembered... though his mother, father, and smather could have possibly later recounted the strange call from interdimensional television executives at the birthing futon, and perhaps something of their message, which Sett might have been able to make sense of when this project began years later.

But no, they simply went for the classic three or four second pause.

The transponder jumps to life.

Chief controller Sett here.

The image congeals and takes shape in the monitor above the two Pentaxians.

Sett. You’ve done it. You’ve found the next Grebo Volpone. Our leading lady.

Stats look good.

Yes, we know.

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Sett was playing it cool, doing his best to

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Sett. We want her up here immediately. More screen tests, headshots, a publicity campaign on its feet, initial interviews, and a new wardrobe. She does have terrible taste in clothing, but we can soon reconfigure this.

Yes, sir. It will be done.

And Sett?

Yes, sir?

Excellent work.

The image on the monitor winks out into inky blackness, and Sett can once again hear the Pentazian rain against the simulated portholes of the command orb.

It had been nearly two years now since Sett had produced results like this. He felt the old confidence filling his small body once again. Many had said that Sett was washed up— a has-been from the uranium age of television. In truth, it had been some time. The first critically acclaimed move in his career was acquiring the actor, Bronson Pinchot, who had enjoyed a period of success on the Earth screen. He had been fantastic on Pentax... such limitless expression coupled with that deadpan accent— an absolute gem. Within the decade, the actor had revived most of the Pentaxian classics which few others had dared approach due to their demanding emotional and physical requirements in performance. But this... this new find could very likely put Sett's career through the proverbial skydome.

His smather would be very pleased.

Take us down, Glip, says Sett, reaching for the bottle of Thadbury's gin which he had saved for a special occasion such as this and unscrews the rather cheap aluminum lid. Open a channel to Bains and confirm an aphid-drixo-velvet. And convey our congratulations on an excellent catch.

Glip maneuvered a series of controls, and the command orb descended with a deep hum through the thick downpour.

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